LITERARY NEWS and CRITICISM

The Eternal Feminine in Some Ephemeral Aspects.

THE LADY OF BEAUTY. (Agnes Sorel.) By Frank Hamel. With sixteen illustrations. 8vo, pp. xvi, 312. Brentano's.

A PRINCESS OF THE ITALIAN REFORMATION. Giulia Gonzaga, 1513-'66. Her Family and Her Friends. By Christopher Hare. Illustrated. 8vo, pp. xxiv, 291. Charles Scribner's Sons.

The new school of biography, clever with the pen and even cleverer with scissors and paste pot, is in nothing more shrewd than in its exploitation of woman's eternal fascination. About three out of every five of the "historical" memoirs coming with amazing frequency from the press keep the heroes of the past in the background, or at best in the middle distance. It is for the heroine that the centre of

GIULIA GONZAGA.
(From a portrait, reputed to be of her, in "A Princess of the Italian Reformation.")

the stage is reserved, and, on the whole, this policy is doubtless sound enough. Since biography is to compete with fiction as a form of light entertainment, the ladies are surely the first to be considered. They are lovely and romantic. They brush affairs of state with the fringes of their frou-frou, and thereby give a tinge of seriousness to our interest in their careers, but mostly they are content to be charming. Beguiling apparitions they are, and, incidentally, they illustrate the immemorial power of the sex. If we are to believe the stories about them now put before us, they have always had the vote, even when their thoughts have not begun to comprehend the philosophy of the suffragette.

Mr. Hamel's enchanting Frenchwoman of the fifteenth century is a case in point. Witness the manner of her entrance into the circle of Charles VII, when she comes to court in the train of Isabelle de Lorraine: "Suddenly there stepped forth from the end of the queue a young girl of surpassing beauty. It was Agnes Sorel. The King's eyes were riveted on her face." There you have the whole story. All that was necessary in those golden days was for a woman to be young, beautiful and predisposed to love. That, at all events, is the point of view from which Mr. Hamel writes of his uncrowned queen. She was as discreet as she was radiant. "She was clever, but not obtrusively so," which was perhaps as well, considering the nervous, exacting temperament of the monarch whom it was her destiny to sway. Charles was a sick and timid creature, who needed just such a wise but diplomatic counsellor. How, precisely, did she help him, and how are we to measure her services to France? The authorities have disagreed as to her scope and a good deal is to be said for the hypothesis advanced by the skeptical, that her influence told only in court intrigues of a minor sort. On the other hand, it is probably true that her love for the King declared itself in ways more creditable than those commonly characteristic of a court favorite.

She had a generous nature, as is shown by tales of her charities and of her clemency. She seems also to have been courageous and to have stimulated Charles to kingly conduct. Whether or not she really spurred him to the decisive action which swept the English out of Normandy is a question still debatable, but there is evidence in the broad drift of her story that she was on the side of the royal dignity. Though Mr. Hamel is confessedly sympathetic toward the legendary conception of her character, such documents as we possess incline the reader to accept his view of the matter. Agnes Sorel did harm, as all such parasites, helping to drain the resources of the kingdom, have always done harm; but she did some good, too. Charles was the better for her unselfish companionship, and to that extent at least she contributed to what was soundest in his rule. This biography, though of no great weight, is worth while. Besides giving a good portrait of a figure less familiar than some others in the annals of French court ladies it picturesquely sketches her period.

The lady who writes over the pseudonyme of "Christopher Hare" is something of a sentimentalist, and she is more than liberal in her estimate of what may be allowed in the compilation of such memoirs as "A Princess of the Italian Reformation." She has scarcely got into the swing of her narrative before she says: "I must ask the indulgence of all the serious students of scientific history if I pass for a time into the realms of 'Historical Romance' in my earnest endeavor to recreate the atmosphere of this most interesting period of the Renaissance." Forthwith, she proceeds to a recital of events taking on in part the semblance of a diary written by her heroine. Decidedly, this is not a book to take with much seriousness. But why not take it for what it is worth and enjoy it? It is thoroughly enjoyable. The author does recreate the atmosphere of the Renaissance and brings us most delightfully into the company of Giulia Gonzaga. That dainty child of the renowned house of Mantuan princes was launched upon life, like all her young kinsfolk, with precious advantages. Reared in the traditions of Vittorino da Feltre she absorbed in her earliest years a reasonable amount of classical learning. Poetry, music and dancing engaged her blithe spirit. On her marriage to Vespasiano Colonna, girlish though she was, she was already fitted to play an effective part in the world.

At fifteen she was a widow and free to lead her own life. It was not long afterward that she experienced a fairly fantastic adventure, barely escaping from the clutches of the Barbary pirate Barbarossa, who had planned to carry her off to the Sultan. Christopher Hare naturally makes the most of this dramatic episode. But the bulk of the book rightly tends to expose the strong intellectual cast of Giulia's character, to bring out her elevating influence upon society, and, especially, to emphasize her religious zeal. This last, instinctive from the outset, was richly fostered by her acquaintance with the Spanish mystic Valdes. She attentively pondered his writings and sayings, admitted his disciples to her friendship and with money and personal energy did what she could to promote the object of the Italian reformers, "a return to the simple elements of Christianity in creed and conduct," without schism. There are no great tangible achievements in this sphere of progress to be attributed to Giulia Gonzaga, but she was a wellspring of aid and comfort to other workers and she left her modest mark. She did so, too, without sinking the woman of brains in the pietist. Though she came to know the life of the convent, she retained her interest in the world outside. She lived and died a type of noble and useful womanhood. In Christopher Hare's book she commands not only respect but liking. She had great charm.

PROVINCIALISM

"A Best-Seller's" Reflections and Opinions.

THE PROVINCIAL AMERICAN, AND OTHER PAPERS. By Meredith Nicholson. 12mo, pp. 237. Boston: The Houghton Mifflin Company.

These papers—Mr. Nicholson eschews the graver word "essays" with wise modesty—deal with many American topics, and practically throughout from what he himself chooses to call the "provincial" point of view, which sets apart New York and, to a lesser degree, Boston. Now, the attitude of New York toward the rest of the country is largely a humorous one. That of the rest of the country toward New York, on the other hand, is serious, disapproving, with, below the surface, an uneasy consciousness of ruffled self-complacency. The case of Boston does not concern us here. Be it added at once that New York, too, has its provincialism. All world cities have, Paris most of all, though in course of time Berlin is likely to surpass it in this larger form of self-complacency.

Mr. Nicholson's attitude is professedly that of all "provincial" Americans, North and South and East and West, but in reality it is that of his own region, the Middle West, of Indiana more by token, and of Indianapolis in the last analysis. That city is "home" to him, its ways homelike, the most distinguished of its literary citizens, Lew Wallace, his ideal, not as a diplomatist, be it understood, or even as an author, but as a provincial American—in reality, as a typical American of the Middle West. Mr. Nicholson points to William Allen White's "A Certain Rich Man" as the best expression of what he would say within the briefer compass of his paper, but he lays stress upon the æsthetic and intellectual culture of the life of his choosing, whereas that novel is strikingly silent on the subject. As a matter of fact, Mr. Nicholson does not help us much forwarder in our understanding of provincialism. He merely expresses a personal preference, which is the result of birth and early association rather than of protracted experimentation elsewhere, and gives his reasons. We are personally conducted through the attractions of Indianapolis, somewhat after the manner of a guidebook, and on the way are invited to behold James Whitcomb Riley, Booth Tarkington and other Indiana celebrities of letters. Their line is an older one than many of us know, so we are informed, for Coggeshall's "Poets and Poetry of the West" (1867) attributes half a dozen poets to the Hoosier capital.

Mr. Nicholson is rather inconclusive in discussing the question, "Should Smith Go to Church?" It were perhaps better to say that such conclusions as he reaches are the commonplaces of us all. "The Tired Business Man" continues to bear the attention that is being bestowed on him quite well. Of course, the author is at his best on his own professional ground, which is far from provincial indeed, in his "Confessions of a Best-Seller."

MERCHANT MARINERS

Famous Types in the Sea Trade of the World.

THE SEA TRADER: HIS FRIENDS AND ENEMIES. By David Hannay. Illustrated. 8vo, pp. xi, 388. Boston: Little, Brown & Co.

The literature of the sea, so far as the landsman is concerned, deals almost entirely with the picturesque exceptions, with privateers, buccaneers and pirates, with shipwreck, buried treasure and sudden wealth beyond the dreams of avarice. Not so this book, which is a general survey of the normal conditions under which the trade of the world has been conducted at sea from earliest times. It does not fail to deal, so far as this is necessary, with the romantic subjects referred to above, since they, too, are parts of the history of the subject, but its main stress is laid on the less eventful routine of the life and work of ships, shipmasters and sailors, and on the changes which they have undergone in the course of centuries. The record ends with the abolition of sea trading monopolies and the entrance into the field of the fast American clipper in the first quarter of the last century.

As is so often the case, this record of sober, hard, everyday facts is as readable, as interesting, as their wildest adaptation to romantic purposes. Trade by sea began in the far and distant past by coasting. The long sea voyage was as yet impossible. This oldest form of sea trading still survives among the islands of the Southern Pacific and, to a far less degree, in the archipelago of the eastern Mediterranean, where, indeed, this survey begins, with the voyage of the fleet of the Egyptian Queen Hatshepitsu, thirty-five centuries ago, to the land of Punt, whence it returned loaded with rich merchandise, including slaves. Mr. Hannay briefly reviews the paucity of our knowledge of the size of the ships of Greek and Roman antiquity—he even takes a glimpse at the vexed question of the construction of the trireme—but, though there is much mention of large ships in the writers of that distant day, no evidence of them survives. As a matter of fact, he says, ships were weak and unfit for long and dangerous voyages up to the end of the Middle Ages, with which, indeed, his continuous chronicle may be said to begin. Most revealing are his occasional references to the sea trade of the Orient for purposes of illustration and comparison. He accepts unquestioningly Marco Polo's description of the mighty Chinese junks, "the Manzi ships that sail upon the Indian seas." Is it likely, he asks, that the great traveller would have tried to tell a nautical whopper to his fellow Venetians, the boldest and best seamen of their day?

The lot of the sailorman of the Middle Ages was far from the hard one it has been pictured to be. His serious grievances and abuses arose later. The author gives some details of mediæval maritime laws, especially of the "laws of Oleron," commonly ascribed to Eleanor of Aquitaine, which in the thirteenth century were in force as far north as the Baltic ports. Then there was the Catalan "consolato del maro," from which it appears that the skipper was not then the autocrat he later became, but rather the president of a floating republic, and, on occasion, the "chairman of a debating society," as Mr. Hannay expresses it. With one of his illuminating references to the East he shows how this is still the case among the Malay crews of the island trade of the South Seas, for, as Gibbon observed, "similar manners would naturally be produced by similar situations." The mediæval sailor shipped for short voyages. Crew, skipper, owners, all belonged to the same port: unavoidable hardships of food and lodging aboard were counterbalanced by conditions that commanded fair treatment. Systematic ill-treatment of crews as a source of profit, since it encouraged desertion, with the implied relinquishment of wages due, was a modern invention.

The men of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were indifferent to pain and needless risk of death for others and for themselves. They were not necessarily brutal to individual sufferers, but they took it for granted that disease and death were incidental to adventure, and they acted as though they thought precaution useless.

The mediæval mariner was far from inadequately provided with sailing directions in MS., and later in print. They were known as "rutters" (route books) in English, and as "portulane" in Italian, but far less is known of the northern directions than of those of the Mediterranean seamen. The first charts are credited to the sea traders of the Balearic Islands.

In a review of a book of the scope of the present one it is possible only to dip here and there into its pages and bring out a bit of curious information. England's need of men to man her ships, of which we hear so much today, is nothing new. The press gang is there to prove it. Seventeenth-century Holland manned its merchant marine largely with Scandinavians. The Portuguese of the great era of exploration were good sailors, but decidedly poor shipbuilders. Naturally, much space is devoted to this period, both in the waters of the New World and in those of India. It was the "heroic age of the merchant skipper." He was navigator and trader, fighter and diplomatist, and founder of factories and strongholds. In South America a seventeenth-century Spanish Governor laid up a fortune of £3,000,000 in fifteen years by winking at smuggling and pocketing his "rake-off." The ships of the English East India Company were not owned by the company in the sense that the Cunard Line owns its ships. They were hired for a certain number of voyages, four of them being considered to end a vessel's period of usefulness. Under favorable circumstances a voyage was completed in eighteen months. The builder of the discharged Indiaman had the right of constructing her successor—what became known as the right of "hereditary bottoms." Commanders and crews had "hereditary" moral rights of re-engagement. The settlement of these rights, when the custom was abolished, cost the company £348,000.

As for the pirate, romance notwithstanding, he was "a sneaking thief and an arrant coward. I have met no instance in which he put up a good fight. He did not even accumulate treasure. A sluttish idleness and freedom to drink were the real attractions of the life." The blackest blot upon the history of maritime commerce is the slave trade.

The chapter on "The Sea Trader in War Time" is decidedly worth while, because it deals with necessities, not with international law, decrees, blockades, and the like. As for the sailorman, the last fifty years have seen the amelioration of his moral and physical condition the world over, by legislation and organized private effort. This is not a book for those who go down to the sea in ships alone. It is most interesting reading for the landlubber. The student of history will find in it a wealth of information not easily accessible elsewhere.

THE MYSTICAL TURK

A Timely Study of Him in Peace and War.

MYSTICISM AND MAGIC IN TURKEY. An Account of the Religious Doctrines, Monastic Organizations and Ecstatic Powers of the Dervish Orders. By Lucy M. J. Garnett. Illustrated from photographs. 12mo, pp. ix, 202. Charles Scribner's Sons.

A seasoned acquaintance with the writings of Mahometan mysticism, combined with some first-hand knowledge of the operations of Dervish orders, makes Miss Garnett's new book a suitable guide for the reader who, not being a specialist, would like to estimate the weight of religious influences on popular opinion in the Turkish empire. A practical political concern is bound up with the principles and activities of the Dervishes, whose fraternities and monasteries have been established in European Turkey more firmly than elsewhere. In controversies with respect to Islam and civilization no account is usually taken of the mystical side of religious belief as a native element of antagonism to the most essential Mahometan doctrines. The speculative protests against rigid orthodoxy were not without tangible results in Persia. Miss Garnett thinks that the movement of Babism, so ferociously suppressed, gave greater promise than any other event connected with the East of "that only possible kind of regeneration—regeneration from within." Should a movement similar to that of Babism and, like it, derived from the Dervishes, break out in Turkey, its importance might be more quickly understood than was Persian Babism.

The Dervish orders had their rise in the lifetime of Mahomet himself among the followers of Abu Bekr, the first Khalif, and Ali, the third Khalif. One of the most numerous and popular orders in Turkey to-day is the Nakshibendi fraternity, whose "rule" is held to be in strict accordance with that instituted by Abu Bekr. While many orders live a conventual life, the Nakshibendi live in their own homes and pursue their ordinary avocations, meeting only at stated times for the performance of religious exercises. Miss Garnett describes the initiatory rites, the varying disciplines and the symbolic garb of several mystic brotherhoods, and she has some illuminating pages as to the women's societies affiliated with the Dervish orders. Since the days of Rabia al Adawia, women have attained to honorable places among the Sufis, although only those who have received a good Turkish education are likely to enter upon the mystic path. Of the more ignorant among Moslem women it may be said that they believe implicitly in the wonder-working type of religious leader.

The ancient word "Heaven and earth cannot contain me, but the heart of my faithful servant containeth me" is at the core of Dervish mysticism, the belief in the possibility, for the individual, of union with the Deity. With its implications, and with more than a hint of pantheistic absorption, such teaching has at sundry times brought the mystics under suspicion of attempting to make innovations in the revealed dogmas of Islam and of denying the very existence of a personal Allah, not to speak of setting at nought all law, human and divine, at the bidding of the Inward Light. Reticence in the presence of the uninitiated has, however, often made for an impression of orthodoxy; and the great learning, wide culture and simple, saintly life of many Dervishes has been recognized and respected.

There are also lower aspects of Dervish activity, and Miss Garnett faithfully sets down the fact that not all the orders are either preaching or practising tolerance and universal good will. There is the religious ecstacy, with its unwholesome consequences in a country where persons of weak intellect are deemed candidates for canonization. Martial fanaticism has been understood and not undervalued by sultans and generals, who have sought the aid of the howling dervishes. Roaming excitedly through the camps and rehearsing the blessings promised by the Prophet to those who fight for the faith of Islam, these exhorters have produced many a fine frenzy. Shortly before the outbreak of the troubles in Bulgaria in 1876, one of the zealots completely terrorized the Christian inhabitants of Adrianople. Going from house to house in the Christian quarter he told the startled inmates that Allah had revealed to him his desire that the infidels of the town should be destroyed within three days after Easter. On the Bishop's reporting this to the Governor General the Dervish was sent for and taken to task. His defence was that as he was in his "hal"—ecstasy—when he made the alleged declaration he was not responsible for anything he might have said. Although he was sent out of town under escort, he managed, says Miss Garnett, to elude his guards and to continue his fanatical mission in other parts of the province.

SOUTHERN POETS

Muted Lutes and Silenced Voices.

LITERARY HEARTHSTONES OF DIXIE. By La Salle Corbell Pickett. With portraits and illustrations. 12mo, pp. 365. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company.

"The lustre of our gifted ones is not dimmed by the passage of time, but in the rush of new books upon the world the readers of to-day lose sight of the volumes which wove threads of gold into the joys and sorrows of the generation now travelling the downward slope of life." It is probably true that the new generation is losing sight of Lanier and Timrod and of Simms. Timrod had his brief revival at the end of the last century; Lanier, too, has had his period of renewed recognition more recently. As for Simms, he is already practically forgotten. One wonders, by the way, why Mr. Pickett, while celebrating his verse, has omitted all mention of his fiction, his capital stories of colonial Carolina, by far his more important achievement.

Poe and Francis Scott Key are secure in their fame. America long since conceded "the Poet of Night" to Virginia, though Boston cradled him; none is likely to dispute the claim of the Mother of Presidents to Margaret Junkins Preston, daughter of Philadelphia though she was by birth. Father Ryan, the singer of "The Conquered Banner," should not be forgotten by the South, nor will his answer to General Butler ever be forgotten by the North:

Father Ryan was in New Orleans in 1862, when an epidemic broke out, and devoted himself to the care of the victims. Having been accused of refusing to bury a Federal, he was brought before Butler, who accosted him with great sternness:

"I am told that you have refused to bury a dead soldier because he was a Yankee."

"Why," answered Father Ryan, in surprise, "I was never asked to bury him, and never refused. The truth is, general, it would give me pleasure to bury the whole lot of you."

It is a sad record of wanderings in search of a hearthstone and health and success, a sad tale of broken fortunes, that one finds in these pages: Poe, Lanier, Timrod, Ryan, Simms, Hayne, the shadow of misfortune is over them all, the shadow also of the ruin of civic strife. That oldtime humorist, George W. Bagby, is not forgotten, nor is that unique figure in our fiction of the 60's of the last century, the author of St. Elmo.

These are but brief sketches, far more sparing of quotation than could be wished for the success of their purpose. The illustrations are worth while. "Uncle Remus" is the only living Southern author whom Mr. Pickett includes in his survey.

GERMAN SNAPSHOTS

Half a Century of Memories and Observation.

GERMAN MEMORIES. By Sidney Whitman. With portraits. 8vo, pp. xi, 284. Charles Scribner's Sons.

So much of misinterpretation and deliberate misinformation concerning Germany comes to us nowadays from abroad that this latest of Mr. Whitman's books is doubly welcome and doubly valuable. He knows the country; what is more, he knows its people. He remembers the days before the great events that were marshalled by Bismarck; he saw them come to pass, and has observed their increasing results. In these many brief papers of his, chiefly devoted to prominent personalities, but shot through with generalizations on modern German culture and material civilization, on salient changes of national character and thought and aspirations, he reviews the old, simple days, the present that began at Versailles in 1871, and the other in a row, broken by articles on Berlin, Munich, Dresden and Weimar, the past being always kept in perspective, the better to judge the present.

It is a happy process, at least in Mr. Whitman's skilled hands, this grafting of a serious study of a people on the flowering branches of a delightfully green and fresh anecdotage. How far distant seems the old Emperor's deliberate slighting of Von Moser because he considered the writing of comedies a most undignified occupation for a German officer! The playwright, we learn further, received hardly any share whatever of the English profits of "The Private Secretary," which amounted to £100,000. Moltke's silence in seven languages is world-famous, but in reality his was rather "a Doric brevity. Never a superfluous word marred his laconic sentences." After Sadowa a member of his staff enthusiastically advocated an immediate march on Vienna. "What would you do after you got there?" he asked. Lenbach, on being asked what was his price for portraits, answered: "That depends. From 20,000 marks, which I may ask, down to 5,000, which I may be willing to pay for the privilege of painting an exceptionally interesting face." He disliked painting royal personages, finding most of them uninteresting subjects.

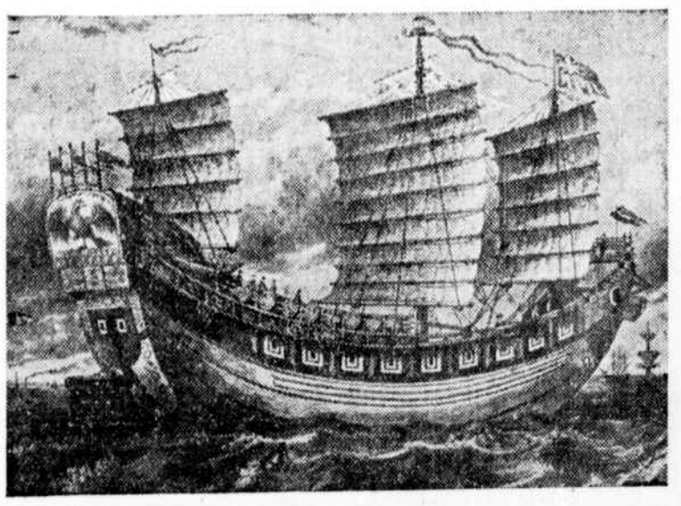
So much has been said of Bismarck that further information concerning him that is worth while would seem almost impossible. Still, here is a really important story that is not generally known. According to it, the famous Herr von Holstein already nursed the idea of the Iron Chancellor's compulsory retirement from office during the lifetime of William I, in the winter of 1887-'88:

A gentleman in a high position was quite unexpectedly asked to lunch by Herr von Holstein. This in itself was an extraordinary occurrence, inasmuch as it was common knowledge that Herr von Holstein led a solitary life and had hardly ever been known to ask guests to his table. In the course of the lunch he spoke deliberately of Prince Bismarck having become too old for the responsibilities of his office, that he was losing his memory and mixed up everything ("er embrouillirte Alles"), and that it was time for the good of the empire that he should be removed from power.

Mr. Whitman, who certainly knows, dissipates a deeply and firmly established opinion when he assures us that in no government offices in any other country with which he is acquainted do foreign journalists meet with the courtesy with which he, at least, has invariably been received in the Wilhelmstrasse, from the sturdy hall porter, with the Iron Cross of 1870 on his breast, throughout the different grades of officials, up to the august Excellency himself, and this whether the visitor represents a journal friendly or otherwise to German interests.

At the time of the Boer War Field Marshal Blumenthal told Mr. Whitman that the English were splendid fellows, but with only one idea, that of shooting or being shot. Their officers were not sufficiently trained, but, added this successful soldier, the Prussians have gone to the other extreme: "The plodding bookworm gets ahead too often now. In my time our people received a sound technical training, but the individual—the personality—was, after all, the deciding element. Hence, our results."

Of Wagner's eccentricities there are here two new instances, one of the visit paid him by the director of the Royal Dresden Opera House, who, having been announced in proper form, was received by the great composer standing on his head against the grand piano, and the other of the old Emperor's only visit to Bayreuth. Wagner's music bored him, but, according to custom, he sent for the composer during an intermission. Wagner told the aide-de-camp that he



THE FIRST CHINESE JUNK TO ROUND THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE.
(From a print in "The Sea Trader.")